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NEBRASKA SNAKE LORE¹

by

Louise Pound

Snakes are peculiarly uncanny writhing creatures. No wonder that fantastic superstitions and tales cluster about them. They have always played a conspicuous role in various types of lore, magical, medicinal, pseudo-scientific, even Scriptural, and among advanced as well as savage peoples. The fateful serpent of the Garden of Eden was no unique figure. Older literature oral and written has told of human beings transformed into snakes, or having snake habits, or of snakes taking on human characteristics. The use of the viper in medicinal practice was mentioned in Pliny's natural history of the first century A. D. It is surprising how many curious beliefs concerning snakes, some recalling mediaeval science or the aboriginal practices of the jungle, yet abound over the United States. A display of these as they persist into our twentieth century has a certain interest, an interest that is anthropological or sociological as well as reptilian, even though made for one State only. Nebraska lore is not so abundant, certainly not so barbaric, as that found among uneducated whites and Negroes in Southern States. But more widespread bits of snake lore are to be found within its limits than would be guessed by those who have never canvassed for it.

My collectanea come directly from Nebraskans, mainly of course from dwellers in less settled regions and smaller towns. They are mostly personally contributed. Snakes are infrequent in cities and fewer superstitions regarding them are handed on by city dwellers. The entries in the following pages have been supplied by both lettered and less lettered contributors. They are reproduced verbatim, or, as nearly as may be, in the words of the informants. They are as complete as I could make them but can hardly be exhaustive. The folklore field, as well known, is an ever-shifting one, with variants springing up constantly and new matter entering.

¹ Read at the Fourth Annual Western Folklore Conference at the University of Denver, July 20, 1944.

The population of Nebraska is mixed, though basically from the British Isles. Pioneers came to the Middle West from many States, bringing with them traditional matter from their old homes. They were joined by immigrants from Old World peoples such as the Scandinavian, German, Dutch, Bohemian. Relevant evidence may sometimes be recorded but it would be futile to attempt to track the origins and wanderings of the mass of superstitions, beliefs, and sayings yet existent in the State.

As regards the attitudes toward their lore of Nebraska informants, more of it is accepted than one might think; much of it is handed on with complete faith in it. A surprising number of the strange cures reported are in actual use in certain regions or in certain families. But a majority of the superstitions or sayings are repeated by skeptics who hand them on but look upon them as mirth-provoking and preposterous.

My concern has been to present traditional Nebraska snake lore and that only. Manufactured "tall tales" about snakes, yarns by humorists or journalists, or evolved in competitive narration I have not tried to collect, though no doubt many of these exist. Nor have I tried to include the lore of foreign groups in Nebraska, such as Mexican, German, Swedish, Dutch, preserved by them in, or translated from, their native languages. And I have not tried to include Negro lore. It has its special interest and is often far more colorful than that of the white population. But other States have far larger Negro populations than Nebraska and would afford better hunting ground. Nebraska Indian lore, too, is a separate subject and deserves separate attention.

Special acknowledgment of indebtedness should go to my colleague, Dr. Ruth Odell, to Pauline Black Holtrop and Louise Snapp when graduate students, to Margaret Cannell of the Agricultural College staff, to successive generations of undergraduate students attending the University of Nebraska, and to many pioneer residents of the State and their descendants. I am also indebted to Richard B. Loomis of Lincoln, who is well versed in snake life and snake ways and who supplied many factual details.

SNAKES AND CURES

The most striking section of Nebraska snake lore has to do with the curative powers associated with snakes, notably the rattlesnake. It was with this snake, naturally enough, that the prairie pioneer was most concerned. For this he most needed remedies, and he

found them in what was most available, such as poultices of animal grease or lard or of prairie plants. The medical use of snakes now surviving, it is to be hoped, for civilized countries only in folklore, can be traced as far back as the elder Pliny and the Greek physician Pedacius Dioscorides in Europe and the founders of Chinese medicine in Asia. The old and widely established prescription of remedies having a revolting smell or taste or revolting associations, this lasting even into modern times, is supposed to have had its origin in the effort to get together nauseous messes that would drive from the soul of primitive man a devil that had slipped in, perhaps when his mouth was open when he slept. Hence were handed down such curatives as angleworm oil, tincture of frog, grease of a black dog, hog's hoof tea, asafoetida, tar, bitters, and the use of the toad and of the viper. That belief in the medical value of the viper persisted in common credence is shown by statements such as the following from an advertisement in Addison and Steele's *The Spectator* of eighteenth-century England:

Whereas the Viper has been a medicine approv'd by Physicians of all nations; there is now prepar'd the Volatil Compound of it, a preparation altogether new . . . the most Sovereign Remedy against all Faintings, Swoonings, Lowness of Spirits, Vapours, etc.

The Volatil Compound of Viper was used no doubt by ladies and gentlemen in the days of Pope and Swift. In the Middle West the viper has been replaced by the rattlesnake as a curative agent.

Remarkable as are some of the Nebraska cures supposed to be efficacious, there are of course many that are just as remarkable, or yet more so, in other States or in the Old World, from which most of our lore except for the prairie cures is a legacy.

CURATIVE POWERS

Application of a snakeskin will cure a headache.

A snakeskin is good for rheumatism.

Put a piece of snakeskin in your pocket to cure rheumatism.

A snakeskin around the head will cure fever.

Application of a snakeskin will cure a headache.

Rattlesnake rattles will cure a headache if held against the head.

Carry rattlesnake rattles in your hatband to cure headache.

Wear the rattles of a rattlesnake in your hat to cure rheumatism.
Let the baby chew rattlesnake rattles to help his teeth through.

Put a rattlesnake rattle in a tobacco bag and hang the bag around a child's neck during teething.

When a baby is fretful while teething, string three large rattles of a rattlesnake on a red cord and put it around the child's neck. Do not remove the rattles until the child is through teething.

A snake head bound on a bruise will effect a cure.

The bite of a rattlesnake will cure tuberculosis.

The warm intestines of a rattlesnake are especially curative for pneumonia.

Wrap a snake around the neck and allow it to creep off and a goiter will disappear.

Snake oil, like the eighteenth-century Volatil Compound of Viper, served or serves as a cure-all. Itinerant medicine peddlers appeared in Omaha and elsewhere as late as the 1930's selling snake oil, supposedly from Indian formulas: "Indian Snake Oil will cure everything but is especially good for rheumatism and rejuvenation."

CURES FOR SNAKE BITES

You must kill the snake if its bite is to be healed.

To cure a snake bite cut the snake to bits and bind it on the wound.

To cure a snake bite cut the snake in half and bind it on the wound.

Kill the snake, cut it, and apply the pieces on the wound.²

If a snake bites you, kill the snake and cut it into pieces and you will not be poisoned.

For a rattlesnake bite, in an emergency, beat cockleburrs to a pulp and apply a poultice.

Cut the outside prickles off the cactus found in the Sand Hills and mash the inside of the plant and apply it to the bite as a poultice.

² Pauline Black Holtrop, "Nebraska Folk Cures," *University of Nebraska Studies in Language, Literature and Criticism*, No. 15, 1935, p. 32, testifies that "A man from Thomas County who was bitten by a rattlesnake immediately cut off the snake's head and then split open its body, cutting it into three-inch pieces. These he applied at once to the wound, discarding each piece as it became saturated with the poison. The snake was not used because of any charm that the man associated with it but as a poultice in an emergency."

Keep it moist with water and change it as often as it becomes warm.

Mash the roots of the milkweed and apply to a rattlesnake bite. Also give the bitten person the milk internally.

Make a poultice of tansy boiled in milk.

Apply fresh cow manure to a snake bite.

A snakeskin will draw the poison from a rattlesnake bite.

Apply hog lard to the wound. Heat the lard and have the patient drink all he can.

Apply a mixture of turpentine and gunpowder to a rattlesnake bite to cure it.

Soak the bite in coal oil for a long time.

Pack mud on a rattlesnake bite to cure it.

Bury the part of the body bitten by the snake in the ground and soak the earth with sweet milk.

Whiskey taken internally is a popular snakebite remedy:

"Drink all the whiskey you can, the more the better."

Tobacco juice will cure a snake bite. Tobacco served on the whole as the most popular poultice for a snake bite.³

Puncture the skin around the bite with the sharp points of the soapweed to let the poison run out.

Keep jabbing the swollen places with a sharp knife until the black blood and water come out. This will be the poison.

Scarify the flesh as deeply as the fangs went and make at least two incisions. Then apply table salt.

Apply the warm flesh of an animal, especially the intestines, to draw out the poison.

Split a live chicken and place on the snake bite to draw out the poison.

If there are any chickens available, cut one open either after it has been killed or while it is still alive, and put it over the snake bite. Before long the chicken will be all green from the poison which it has drawn out. It takes nearly a dozen chickens to draw all the poison from the wound.

³ Mrs. Holtrop also reported that the late Captain Lute North of Columbus, Nebraska, a resident of the State since 1856 and a well-known personage in his region, told of a man he once saw cured of a rattlesnake bite by the application of tobacco. Another man chewed quantities of it and kept the hand well-poulticed. The man who was bitten recovered from the bite but the man who chewed tobacco for the poultice became very ill.

Kill an animal, preferably a cow, and slit a hole in the abdomen. Bury the bitten area in the middle of the animal. Leave it there until the carcass becomes cold and then remove. The poison from the bite will be drawn out.

When a horse is bitten by a rattler take a sharp knife and scarify the wound until it bleeds freely. Cut the tips from five or six blades of soapweed, stick them all around the wound and leave them for 24 hours.

Drench a bitten animal with warm lard out of a bottle to cure a snake bite.

The familiar advice "When bitten by a snake suck the wound and spit out the blood and saliva" is the soundest of the folk cures reported and that reported most frequently. It is recommended in the manual for Boy Scouts.⁴

WEATHER SIGNS

Some persons seem to think that snakes may serve as rain-making charms, or may contribute to the control of rain. Sometimes those who pass farms observe dead snakes hung on bushes, fences, or barns, apparently as rain-making agents.

When a snake is killed and hung up it will rain. The higher the snake is hung the harder it will rain.

If you hang a snake on the fence it will bring rain.

If you hang a snake on the fence it will rain until it is taken off.

If a snake is hung on a fence on its back it is a sign of rain.

It is a sign of fair weather the next day if a snake lies on its back.

If a snake lies on its back it is a sign of rain.

It is a sign of clear weather if a snake lies on its back in its death throes.

If a snake leaves the water for higher ground it will rain.

If snakes or toads are around dwellings it is a sign of stormy weather.

If frogs or snakes come about the house it will rain the next day.

If snakes cross the road in unusual numbers it will rain.

⁴ Madge E. Pickard and R. Carlyle Buley, *The Midwest Pioneer, His Ills, Cures, and Doctors*, Crawfordsville, Indiana, 1945, note no instances of the use of snakes as curatives but say of snake bites (p. 42): "Snake bites offered a wide choice of remedies, from white plantain boiled in milk, ash bark tea, alum water, or whiskey internally applied, to incisions and applications of salt and gunpowder, black ash leaves, crushed garlic juice, or salt and tobacco."

Snakes crossing your path mean a long drouth. Snakes migrate to wet regions.

If when tossed up a snake alights on its back, it will rain. If it does not alight on its back do not expect rain.

Snakes waken when they hear thunder.

Warm spring weather is sometimes referred to as "snake time."

LUCK

Good Luck

It is good luck to kill the first snake you see in the spring.

It is good luck not to kill the first snake you see in the spring.

Bull snakes in the yard bring good luck.

Keep a bull snake in the yard for good luck. Bull snakes are never to be killed.

Kill a snake when you see one and you will have good luck.

The rattles of a rattlesnake will bring good luck.

If you kill a rattlesnake keep the rattles for good luck.

Rattles carried around the neck bring good luck.

Rattles carried anywhere bring good luck.

Bad Luck

Expect to have bad luck if a snake crosses your path.

It is very bad luck if a rattlesnake crosses your path.

It means bad luck if you kill a snake.

You will have bad luck if you do not kill the first snake you see in the spring.

"Bull snakes climbing trees mean bad luck."

DREAMS

If you dream of a snake it is a sign that a friend is betraying you.

Dream that a snake bites you and you will hear of the death of a friend.

Snakes in dreams signify enemies.

To dream of a snake you do not kill means that you have an active enemy. If in your dream you kill the snake you will become friends with your enemy.

If in your dream you kill the snake that has bitten you, you will conquer your enemy. If the snake gets away you will be conquered. Dream that a snake bites you and you will have trouble with a friend. If you dream of a snake you will hear of the death of a friend. If you dream of snakes you will get money the next day. If you tell the snake dream, you will quarrel with the person to whom you told it. Report a dream about a snake and you will quarrel with some one.

PREVENTIVES

A snake will not cross over a rope, especially a horsehair rope. Make a horsehair circle or ring to keep snakes away for they will not cross it. Campers in a rattlesnake country coil a horsehair rope about them at night to keep snakes away. This practice is said to be still relied on occasionally. "A rattlesnake has been known, however, to squirt his poison over the rope upon the sleeper." (Horsehair rope around a person is not reliable protection. If a snake is placed inside a coil of rope it promptly crawls over it. But, to some extent, snakes do avoid crawling over objects, or crawling uphill.) Keep hogs on a farm to drive away snakes. Hogs will kill rattlesnakes. If you live in the rattlesnake region, keep hogs on the farm, as the hogs will smell out the rattlesnakes and kill them. "This is believed by many farmers." (Hogs and other animals, as deer, do kill a great number of snakes.) Kill and cut to pieces a snake that bites you and you will not be poisoned. Carry a rattlesnake's rattle in your pocket and it will prevent small pox. If you do not kill the first snake of the season your enemies will torment you.

SNAKES AND ANIMALS, BIRDS, INSECTS, PLANTS

Hogs will kill snakes. Thus they keep snakes away from farm buildings. (See under Preventives.) If there are hogs on the farm all the rattlesnakes will leave, as the hogs can smell out the rattlesnakes and kill them. "This is believed by many farmers." A cat will warn you that a snake is around, for it will sit unmoved and watch a snake until some one comes to kill it.

A dog bitten by a rattlesnake will crawl into a mud hole and stay there for a time to draw out the poison.

If a cow goes dry it is because a "milk snake" has sucked it. One contributor testified that "a milk snake was seen sucking a cow, in Pennsylvania, while the cow was in its stall. This, I believe, is not a superstition." ("Milk snakes" are of no great height, have small teeth that no cow would tolerate, do not carry milk stools, and have never been known to drink milk.)

Snakes and prairie dogs are amicable companions.

A snake and a prairie dog will lie down together amicably in the same burrow.

Snakes and prairie dogs and owls are supposed to live amicably together in their holes on clay banks. (Snakes inhabit prairie dog burrows but not in amicable companionship. Sometimes they do so to eat the young of a prairie dog, or baby owls. Sometimes also for hibernation.)

"Snake doctors" or "snake feeders", *i.e.*, dragon flies, warn snakes of danger.

So long as the head of the snake remains, a "snake doctor" can renew a dead snake's vitality.

There are always snakes close to "snake flowers." "These are wild iris," a contributor suggested; but other plants go by the name, as viper's bugloss, white dead-nettle, stichwort, starflower, white campion.

SNAKE DEATH

If you kill a snake it will not die until sundown.

If you kill a snake it will not die until sunrise.

If you kill a snake it will move (wiggle, wriggle) its tail until sundown. One contributor commented that he found by testing it that this is not true. Another reported that "It is true that if you cut a snake's tail off close to the head, it will be a long time before the body becomes motionless." (It retains motion and activity for some time, if stimulated.)

A snake cut in pieces will come together again.

If you cut a snake in two pieces the two pieces will get together and crawl away.

Cut a snake in two and, no matter where the two parts are, the head will go back, find the tail, and attach itself to the tail.

Some snakes if struck will break into pieces and later join into entirety again. Such snakes are called "glass snakes." (The "glass snake" is actually a lizard. Two-thirds of its length is usually a brittle tail. It can generate a new tail which looks as if it was put on. But it cannot get its old tail back.)

If any vitality yet remains in a snake, the "snake doctor" (dragon fly) can bring it to life again.

If you kill a rattlesnake and cut it into two parts, young will crawl out, because the mother snake eats her young for their protection. (There is no authentic testimony that a mother snake eats her young, or swallows them for their protection, or that in either case they remain alive.)

Poisonous snakes follow the trail of their killed mates, perhaps to avenge them.

A bull snake will kill a rattlesnake but will die itself of the poison.

A rattlesnake will bite itself and die if surrounded by cactus thorns by a road runner. (A variety of bird noted for running at great speed. Road runners sometimes hang up on cactus snakes and lizards they kill. Road runners are not found in Nebraska.)

HABITS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Some snakes have stingers at the end of their tails. They sting instead of bite.

A rattlesnake will strike twice its length.

A snake eats but once a month. (Snakes eat about every week, or whenever their last meal is digested.)

Poisonous snakes are born alive. "Other snakes are hatched from eggs." (Poisonous snakes are born alive, except the coral snake from the Southeast United States.)

The shape of a snake's head is supposed to determine whether or not it is poisonous.

The number of its rattles is an indication of the years of age of a rattlesnake. (The number is an indication of the snake's sheddings, which is from one to four times a year. When a rattler sheds, it gets a new segment or rattle on its tail.)

A rattlesnake does not poison itself when it strikes itself. (It poisons other rattlers but not itself.)

Snakes will not bite when they are in the water. (They will bite but not strike.)

Once a snake strikes, its fangs drop out and it cannot bite until they grow in again. (Partly true. Snakes have a series of new teeth

in different stages of development beside each tooth. When a tooth is lost, one of the successional series takes its place. They shed their fangs when they shed their skin, and at fairly regular intervals.)

Rattlesnakes lay eggs. (True for most species of snakes.)

A rattlesnake will never strike a small child. "Dad, when a small child, played with one."⁵

A rattlesnake will not strike a person from the rear. "To go fishing once we had to cross a prairie dog town which, as are all such towns, was infested with rattlesnakes and owls. To protect ourselves we tied a half of stovepipe on the front of our legs and walked safely through, relying on the saying that the snake would not strike after we had passed."

A hoop snake will swallow its tail and roll down hill.

If when rolling down hill a hoopsnake releases its tail and strikes its stinger into a tree, the tree will die.

If the hoopsnake while rolling down a hill rolls into any living thing, the thing will die.

"Whoopsnakes (*sic*) are so poisonous that a tree will die if they bite it."

Some snakes are supposed to be able to enter a hen house and suck eggs.

Snakes go blind during dog-days. (Now usually counted from July 3 to July 11.)

Snakes go blind in the late part of summer.

Rattlesnakes do not bite and poison people during the months of fall.

They are supposed to bite only during the spring, when they shed their skin and are blind. (Rattlesnakes do go blind when they shed their skin, which is when it becomes too tight for the growing body beneath. This is usually from four to six times a year, depending on the food supply. It may be in spring, summer, or fall.)

A side winder will kill any living thing it touches.

⁵ Compare, Pickard and Buley, *The Midwest Pioneer*, etc., p. 78: "About the only thing the child did not have to worry about was snake bite, for that just naturally could not happen to him until he was seven years old. Then, when bitten, if he did not approve of good liquor or gunpowder, he could draw on a toad to draw out the poison. If the toad died another was tied on. When the toad lived all the poison was out. Carrying an onion in the pocket provided insurance against snake bite, but if one were bitten, it was necessary for him to eat the heart of the offending reptile if he would gain further immunity. Spitting into the mouth of the snake would kill it and prevent serious harm, or the curse of Adam ("God created everything and it was good; save thou alone, snake, are cursed; cursed shalt thou be and thy poison") might be put upon it, and then it would sneak away and die of shame."

A blue racer will chase you if you run from it but will flee if you turn on it.

Blue racers will chase you. If you cut them into pieces they will join together again. (Blue racers will follow, not chase a person. The popular explanation is that they do so from "curiosity.")

Snakes have hypnotic powers. They are able to hypnotize small game, as birds, rabbits, frogs. Some believe that they can hypnotize human beings. "I have been hypnotized by a large bull snake in the field," one contributor testified. Perhaps this belief is to be explained by the fact that the victims are overcome by fear. (W. G. Simms, *The Yemassee*, 1835, describes in vivid detail, Chapter XX, the hypnotizing of his heroine, Bess Matthews, by a rattlesnake.)

When frightened, some species of snake swallow their young to protect them. (This may be partly true, but the later release of them and the "protection" are legendary.)⁶

SAYINGS

Animal reference always looms large in proverbial lore, especially as a source of comparison applicable to human beings. Domesticated animals play a prominent part, such as the pig, hog, mule, ox, lamb, hare, horse. So do birds, insects, and the snake. Snake similes, used for disparagement, have a conspicuous place.⁷

As cold as a snake.

As crooked as a snake.

As deadly as a cobra.

As poisonous as a snake.

As treacherous as a snake.

Like a snake in the grass.

Hiss like a snake.

⁶ John J. Strecker ("Reptile Myths in Northwestern Louisiana," *Publications of the Texas Folk-Lore Society* IV, 1925, 42-52, also "Reptiles of the South and Southwest in Folk-Lore," V, 1926, 66, and his "Dragons and Other Reptiles Real and Imaginary," *Baylor University Contributions to Folk-Lore*, No. 3, 1929, 66) lists leading snake myths, mostly from Negro sources. He includes the myth of the coach or whip snake which whips its victims with its tail, the joint snake which breaks into pieces when struck, the hoop snake which rolls, the stinging snake, the milk snake, the thunder snake (with legs) and others. He raises the question whether snakes ever really swallow their young and seems to hold that this is another snake myth and catalogues it as such.

⁷ See Louise Snapp, *Proverbial Lore in Nebraska*, University of Nebraska Studies in Language, Literature, and Criticism, No. 13. 1933.

Lower than a snake's belly.
Madder than snakes in haying.
Nourish a viper in the bosom.
If it was a snake it would have bit you.
Sew on Friday and you'll get snakes in the house.

MISCELLANEOUS

Pull out a human hair, place it in a glass of water, and it will turn into a snake within two weeks.

Pull out a horse hair and place it in a rain water barrel and in two weeks it will turn into a snake. (I have heard many persons affirm this with unshaken conviction. Perhaps the belief has its basis in some chemical action of the hair during the two weeks of its immersion. There is a so-called "hair snake," but it is really a worm. It frequently appears in water or near water plants but it does not come from human hair or horse hair.)

If you suck the poison from a wound from a snake bite, your teeth will fall out. (Those who have bleeding gums when they suck poison from a wound are definitely likely to find their teeth loosening.)

Stepping on a dead snake will make sores break out on your fingers.

Stepping on a dead snake will make sores break out on your feet.

A bull snake is believed to kill rattlesnakes.

A bull snake will kill a rattlesnake but will die itself of the poison.

A bull snake will tease a rattler until the rattler strikes at him. The bull snake dodges. The rattler misses him and on the return will hit and poison himself. (Mistaken identity may explain this belief. Bull snakes do not kill rattlesnakes but king snakes do kill other snakes. There is some resemblance between king snakes and rattlesnakes.)

Two snakes can each grab the other's tail and swallow it until both snakes disappear.

"Keep the rattles from a rattler in a violin and it will play better. My grandfather had such a violin." (Compare, "The town fiddler practiced there with snake rattles in his violin to make the tone clearer . . .". *The Last of the Bad Men*, a biography of Tom Horne by Jay Monaghan, 1946, p. 43.)

A few contributions of strange lore imported into Nebraska, coming from groups not taken into account in the preceding pages, are:

"Snakes are the abiding place of devils. You cannot kill them except with some instrument in the form of a cross." (From a German family arriving in Nebraska in the 1920's.)

"A rattlesnake having a poison sac in its mouth must remove it to drink, in order to keep from poisoning itself. If you steal the sac the snake goes wild with anger and dashes itself against the rocks." (Told as fact by a Mexican from San Antonio.)

"To keep Negroes wearing their shoes they are told that snakes will bore a hole in their feet to get in the blood stream and consume the blood, killing the person." (Told by a contributor in Lincoln, Nebraska.)

The searcher for curious beliefs and survivals finds them naturally enough in the greatest numbers in the communities that are farthest behind our contemporary civilization and among the classes having least sophistication. Illiteracy fosters their vitality. The less well-read a person is, the larger the number of superstitions he cherishes, the more barbaric his superstitions, and the greater his credulity. That Nebraska superstitions are on the whole relatively mild may be illustrated by the following from other States:

Snake dust, made by pulverizing a dried snake, put into a person's food will grow to full-sized reptiles within that person.

The blood of a blacksnake, taken warm with whiskey will enable you to do more work than anyone else.

Eat the brains of a snake or rat to bring skill in conjuring.

Take a dried one-eyed toad, a dried lizard, the little finger of a person who committed suicide, the wings of a bat, the eyes of a cat, the liver of an owl, and reduce all to a powder. Then cut up into fine pieces a lock of hair from a dead (natural) child, and mix it with the powder. Make a bag of a piece of sheet that has been used as a shroud, put all the material into it and put it into the pillow of the intended victim when nobody is aware of your action. A few feathers run through the top will expedite matters.⁸

University of Nebraska

⁸ This complicated voodoo conjuring charm is from New Orleans. See H. M. Wiltse, *Journal of American Folklore*, XIII (1900), 211. For the preceding bits of lore, see Newbell Niles Puckett, *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* (1926), 222, 322.

THREE EARLY HYMN WRITERS

by

Mary O. Eddy

AMZI CHAPIN

(1768-1835)

The name of Amzi Chapin, composer, is of frequent occurrence in hymnals of the nineteenth century. *The Beauties of Harmony*, 1818, is the earliest book coming to my attention in which he is named, and his tunes were still in use as late as 1914 in the Cumberland Presbyterian hymnal, *Songs of Zion*. During this century the name Chapin appears in at least thirty-nine hymnals. Allowing for possible confusion in the title, approximately fifteen different tunes appear under his name, the most popular of which are "Rockbridge," "Forest," "Rockingham" (not to be confused with "Rockingham" by Lowell Mason or "Old Rockingham" by Edward Miller), "Unitia," "Vernon," "Tribulation," and "Ninety-Third."

In the old hymnals the tunes are ascribed variously to Chapin, A. Chapin, Amzi Chapin, L. Chapin, Aaron Chapin, and even to B. Chapin. A few of these variations are doubtless merely errors. As an example, in *The Beauties of Harmony*, 1818, "Rockingham" is accredited to A. Chapin, while in *The Sacred Melodeon*, 1855, the same tune is assigned to B. Chapin. Another error led the editors of a modern reprint to change the name to Chopin, and to embellish a footnote with the dying words of the great Polish composer.

Amzi Chapin had two older brothers, Aaron (1753-1838) and Lucius (1760-1842). Nothing is known as to the musical attainments of these brothers. Their names merely suggest a possible explanation for the variations noted above.

Authentic facts in the life of Amzi Chapin have hitherto not been available. It has been through the help of his great-great-granddaughter, Miss Margaret Means of Akron, Ohio, that I have been permitted to study a diary-account-book kept in the microscopic handwriting of Mr. Chapin himself between the years of 1791 and 1834. This has provided interesting details in the life of an itinerant young music master of the time, details which must be condensed here for the sake of brevity.

Amzi Chapin was born on March 2, 1768, in Springfield, Massachusetts, the same city in which his great-great-grandfather, the pioneer Samuel Chapin, is honored with a statue. Amzi was the

youngest son of Deacon Edward Chapin and Eunice Colton Chapin. Deacon Edward was one of the strong men of the parish, and "Granny Deacon" was a sweet singer who used to take her hymn-book with her when she went calling, to sing to the children who never forgot her clear voice and pleasant ways.

Amzi's older brother, Calvin (1763-1851), deserves mention in passing, in that he was graduated from Yale in 1788, and in 1816 he had the degree of Doctor of Divinity conferred upon him by Union College. In 1820 he was elected a member of the Corporation at Yale, in which capacity he served for twenty-six years. His marriage in 1795 to Jerusha Edwards, granddaughter of Jonathan Edwards, places the Chapins in the long list of distinguished American families. His life and services deserve far more attention than this brief notice.

In 1791, when Amzi was twenty-three years old, he, together with his brother Lucius and wife, left Hartford, Connecticut, for the wilderness. This is the year in which the diary begins, and from it the following data have been taken. Lucius and his wife journeyed on to Kentucky, while Amiza traveled through Virginia and North Carolina, teaching music. He lists as his equipment, purchased on starting, the following: 150 small singing books for which he paid £11-5-0; 40 large singing books, costing £10-0-0; 12 "Laws large ones"; 30 of his small ones; 50 "Keads"; 39 Jocelyn's pamphlets; 30 of his sheets; 6 Psalm books; and 30 gamuts.

He conducted classes in Granville, Wake, Chatham, and Orange Counties, North Carolina, riding often as far as twenty-six miles from class to class. The diary tells of as high as twenty-three members attending with receipts amounting, in one case to £6-11-6 for thirteen days' tuition and books.

Similarly, in 1796, he conducted classes in northern Kentucky in the neighborhood of Lexington, May's Lick, and Washington. So detailed is the account of his work here that one is able to reconstruct a week's schedule. Washington, Kentucky, of the present day has so very many old houses that one can easily imagine one of them as the house Amzi says he bought in 1798 with a lot extending beyond the town "twenty-one poles."

In 1799 he taught singing in Pennsylvania in or near East Liberty, Connellsville (which he calls Connells-town), Dunlap's Creek, Laurel Hill, and Union town (or Beesontown, as it was named then). The following year he married Hannah Power, daughter of Reverend James Power of Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania. His father-

in-law, a graduate from Princeton in 1766, was one of the first ministers to cross the Alleghanies.

In 1803 Mr. Chapin conducted classes in Chillicothe, Ohio, but it was not until 1831 that he moved to Ohio with his family, then consisting of wife, six daughters and two sons. His new home was in Portage County. During the busy years of rearing a large family and managing a farm, he spent considerable time in cabinet making. He writes of making many "bass viols," as he called them. One of these instruments is owned by a great-grandson. From its size, we would probably call it a cello. In addition to this, the family owns handsome desks and other pieces of cabinet work made by Amzi Chapin.

Among the pieces of hand work by Mr. Chapin is a manuscript hymn-book, a beautiful piece of work. This measures 8 by 4½ inches, with 111 numbered pages. In numbering, however, Mr. Chapin read 71 as 77, and continued the numbering from 77. There are, therefore, 105 pages. The work is so carefully done that a page looks more like printing than does the engraved page of *The Easy Instructor* of 1808. The title page and cover have been lost and no date appears. One can make a few surmises about the matter, though they prove nothing. For one thing, the diary makes fewer references to musical matters after 1800, and this gives rise to the theory that he may have written the hymnal while conducting classes in the wilderness. Another guess places it about 1812, for the following reason. There is a letter in existence addressed to Amzi Chapin



A page from Amzi Chapin's Manuscript Hymn-book

from the "House of Patterson and Hopkins," Pittsburgh, dated January 1, 1812, asking Mr. Chapin's aid in the preparation of a hymn-book to contain 50 or 60 pages, to sell at 50 cents. The publisher asked for copy containing the notes "in correct style." It is possible that the manuscript book may have been made in compliance with this request.

Amzi Chapin was a devout Christian, as is proved by his regular attendance on religious services, even in his earlier days. His diary usually quotes the text of the sermon heard. He remained an elder in the Presbyterian Church until his death. He died on September 19, 1835, in his home near Northfield, Ohio, and is buried in the beautiful Northfield Cemetery beside his wife, Hannah, who survived him twenty years.

SAMUEL WAKEFIELD
(1799-1895)

Reverend Samuel Wakefield, well known in his day as the pastor of various Methodist churches of the Pittsburgh district, and teacher of sacred music, is of special interest in our day in the fact of his being the great-grandfather of the distinguished musician, Charles Wakefield Cadman. He was born in Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania, on March 6, 1799, the son of David Wakefield, who came to this country before the Revolution and who served in the colonial army. His mother was the daughter of John Morton, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

Reverend Wakefield started life as a tailor, and, while working at his trade, studied Greek, Hebrew, German, and Latin. He continued to work at his trade all his life, for when he was eighty, he still made his own clothes. When he was eighteen years old, he became a local preacher in the Central State Conference, and a few years later was ordained a Methodist Episcopal minister. He was admitted to the Pittsburgh Conference in 1834, and, between that date and 1880, the year he was placed upon the list of superannuated, he preached uninterruptedly in pulpits in or near Union town, West Newton, and Connellsville.

In 1821 Samuel Wakefield married his choice singer, Elizabeth Hough, daughter of a Westmoreland County distiller. It was not until much later that "Granddaddy Hough" became reconciled to the match. Eventually, however, he came to consider this son-in-law as his choice among many. Ten of the fourteen children of this couple were living at the time of Reverend Wakefield's death on September 13, 1895, when he had reached the age of ninety-six.

During the Civil War, Reverend Wakefield served two terms in the Legislature, a Democrat in politics. He was frequently spoken of for elevation to the bishop's chair, but he never attained that distinction. He had marked ability in music and published nine books of music besides building the first pipe organ west of the mountains. This organ was housed in Wakefield Chapel in Uniontown. Of the nine books he is said to have compiled, I am able to name only seven. These are as follows: *The Christian's Harp*, copyrighted in 1832; *The Minstrel of Zion*, published by Rev. William Hunter, editor of *The Pittsburgh Christian Advocate* and author of *Select Melodies*, and Reverend Samuel Wakefield (the manuscript for this book, which is housed in the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, was printed in 1846 by Sorin and Ball, No. 42 North Fourth St., Philadelphia); *Essential Harmony*; *American Repository of Sacred Music*; *The Western Harp*, published in 1846 by Charles H. Kay, Pittsburgh; *Deutsche Choralbuch*, Cincinnati, Swormstedt and Poe, 1852; and *Sacred Choral*, Cincinnati, Swormstedt and Poe, 1854. Samuel Wakefield was also the author of *Wakefield's Theology*, recognized favorably in the Methodist church.

His vigor remained unabated until old age, for, at seventy-five he was able to shoe the horses on his place, and at ninety he shingled the roof of his porch unaided. His work as a composer is noteworthy in that he harmonized many pieces which bear evidence of folk origin, in this way preserving to us a part of the early ballad music which might otherwise have been lost.

AMOS SUTTON HAYDEN

(1813-1880)

In 1901 the flourishing college located in Hiram, Ohio, published its history, beginning with its organization in 1850 under the name of Western Reserve Eclectic Institute and covering the subsequent half century. According to this history, A. S. Hayden was appointed first principal of the Institute by the Board of Trustees of the newly-chartered college. I am indebted to this history also for some of the material in the following biographical sketch:¹

Amos Sutton Hayden was born in Youngstown, Ohio, on September 17, 1813, the youngest child in a family of seven sons and one

¹*Hiram College and Western Reserve Eclectic Institute — Fifty Years of History, 1850-1900*, by F. M. Green, Cleveland, 1901.

daughter. His father, Samuel Hayden, came from Pennsylvania to Ohio in 1804.

Sutton was a child of slight frame and of a delicate physical organization, but possessor of an eager mind and a fondness for study. He was especially fond of religious books, and is said to have read Hervey's *Meditations* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* at a very early age. Language and literature were more agreeable to him than mathematics. He attended such schools as Youngtown afforded in 1828 and 1829, and there laid a foundation for a classical education, which he was forced to secure without attending college.

He accepted the doctrines of the Christian Church (Campbellite) under the preaching of Walter Scott in 1828, and by 1832 he was using his gift for exhortation, traveling with other associates, especially his brother William.

On May 31, 1837, he was married to Sarah M. Ely of Deerfield, Portage County, Ohio, and settled in Collamer, Cuyahoga County, then known as Euclid, as pastor of the Christian church.

During the seven years between 1850 and 1857, in which he served the institute at Hiram, this school rose to a considerable degree of strength and prosperity. After his connection with Hiram ceased, his life in Collamer was resumed and was interrupted only by one year as pastor and principal of the McNeely Normal Institute at Hopedale, Ohio, and by short periods spent in Eureka, Illinois, and in Hiram. Collamer was the principal scene of his labors for twenty-seven years.

W. T. Moore in *The Living Pulpit of the Christian Church*, (Cincinnati, 1869), states that Hayden made the first compilation of church music to be published for use in his denomination. This book appeared when he was only twenty-one, and was much sought after. This may be the book A. S. Hayden's *Introduction to Sacred Music*, which Dr. George Pullen Jackson dates as 1835. The volume of this work to which I have had access is so badly tattered that the date is illegible. This and *The Sacred Melodeon* copyrighted in 1848 are the only books by Hayden with which I am familiar. The *Introduction to Sacred Music* makes use of four-shape notes, and *The Sacred Melodeon* uses Aiken's six-shape scale and peculiar notation.

Mr. Hayden died at Collamer on September 11, 1880.

Perrysville, Ohio

SOME SOUTHERN ILLINOIS WITCH LORE

by

Jesse W. Harris

In the folk literature of Southern Illinois, witch lore holds an important place.¹ Some of this lore comes down from the earliest settlers, who, with the exception of a trickle in the late eighteenth century, came here in the early 1800's. These pioneers were mostly Scotch-Irish from the southern Appalachian highlands.² Later infiltrations of Germans and other European people have added their bit to the local lore. The purpose of this article is to review our traditional witch lore and to cite some evidence of the survival of the belief in witchcraft into modern times.

That the belief in witchcraft still persists here to some extent is illustrated by the following testimony handed to me recently by a young man from a rural area in Jackson County:

There are still a few people in my community who believe in witches and claim to have had experience with them. The older people of German descent are the ones that believe in witches. Some of my relatives are very firm believers in witches. They claim to have known one or two people that they thought were witches, but those witches have died.

According to the stories that I have heard, a witch will not step over a broom. When a woman was suspected of being a witch, the neighbors tried many ways of hiding a broom where that woman was going to walk. If the woman were a witch, she would walk up to the broom and then reach down and pick it up before going any farther.

The witches usually do their mysterious deeds at night, and they are usually in the form of a cat when they do these deeds. My grandmother said that a second cousin of mine had a lot of trouble with a witch

¹ Southern Illinois or "Egypt" includes roughly the lower third of the state. For various phases of local lore and language, see Charles Neely, *Tales and Songs from Southern Illinois* (1935); Grace Partridge Smith, "Folklore from Egypt," *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 54; D. S. McIntosh, *Singing Games and Songs from Southern Illinois* (1941); Jesse W. Harris, "Pioneer Vocabulary Remains in Southern Illinois," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Dec., 1945, "Dialect of Appalachia in Southern Illinois," *American Speech*, April, 1946, and "Myths and Legends from Southern Illinois," *Hoosier Folklore*, March, 1946.

² Solon Justus Buck, *Illinois in 1818 (Centennial History of Illinois*, Introd. Vol., Springfield, 1917), 96-97.

when he was a small boy. The witch would come and get into bed with him and wouldn't let him sleep. She was always in the form of a black cat, and many times she tried to choke the boy. He finally got so scared of the witch that someone had to sit beside his bed at night to keep the witch away. A witch will not bother a person that she is mad at; so the boy finally succeeded in making her mad, and she didn't bother him any more.

My father's uncle also had some trouble with a witch. She would come in the form of a black cat and wouldn't let him sleep. She would bother him a few nights and then wouldn't come back again for a long time. One night my father's uncle had just gotten into bed when he heard the witch coming. He waited until she had jumped upon the bed, and then he told her he was going to kill her. She left in a hurry and never did come back.

Now that the witches are all dead that lived in my community the people can live in peace.

Superstitious fear of the black cat is perhaps the most widespread of all relics of the old witchcraft beliefs. One of the most unreserved samples of this belief that I have encountered here comes from a coal mining village in Williamson County. My informant told the following story of the black cat's power to do harm:

The story begins with a miner who is extremely superstitious and whose family has the same obsession. On many occasions when the miner would start to his work in a mine near his home, a black cat would cross his path, and without hesitation he would reverse his course and go back home. On these days the crew of which he was a member would be short-handed. This process of being always harassed by the "black cat" superstition went on for some time until the man's will power found new strength and called a halt.

That day the same familiar black cat crossed the same path of the same miner. The miner went home, but he waged a battle of superstition against common sense and decided to go back to work. But he never lived to return again to his wife and four children. For on that day he was horribly maimed in the mine.

Some people called it fate, others said it was his time to go, but I say it was his punishment for defying the undefiable superstition.

A rural teacher in Monroe County told me recently of a mysterious black cat that visited a family gathering in his district. The cat

jumped in turn into the lap of each person in the group, and then disappeared. The conclusion was that the cat was a witch. The black cat, however, serves a good turn on occasion. One Jackson County woman cures rash by killing a black cat and applying the blood to the parts affected.

From one isolated community come the following instances of superstitious fears of recent date: The mysterious rocking of an empty chair was attributed to witches; the stopping of keyholes at night to keep out witches; the firing of a shotgun each night between eight and nine o'clock by the head of a family to frighten away the evil spirits.

The instances cited above are isolated survivals of a once widespread belief in witchcraft. Here, as in other parts of the world, witchcraft was strangely entangled with both religion and medicine. Two of the most noted of the pioneer witch doctors, or witch masters, of this region were also preachers of some note, a fact that gives a fair idea of the respectable social status of the witch doctor in pioneer times. An early writer of local history explains the profession of witch doctor as follows:

They were called witch-masters, who made a profession of curing the diseases inflicted by the influence of the witches, and they practised their profession after the manner of physicians. Instead of "pill-bags," they carried witch balls made of hair, and in strange manner they moved these over the patient, and muttered an unknown jargon, and exorcised evil spirits. . . . Another method was to cork up in a vial, or bottle, the patient's urine, and hang it in the chimney. This gave the witch strangury, which lasted as long as the vial hung in the chimney.³

Griffin Tipsword and Charley Lee were two of the outstanding witch masters of the early days in Southern Illinois. Tipsword, the first white settler in Effingham County, not only was a preacher of the word of God but also a man "who could exorcise witches, conjure ghosts, remove 'spells,' make 'silver tea' for cattle sick of the murrain or otherwise bewitched."⁴ Since witches were of the devil's party, it was no doubt fitting that a man of God should have power to counteract their evil doings. "He kept sacred his witch-balls to the day of his death. These were made of deer's and cow's hair,

³ *History of Union County* (1883), p. 281.

were large, and held together by a long string. They constituted his *materia medica*." ⁵ His procedure was this:

When people were bewitched, they would send for Tip-sword or take the patient to him. He would doctor them by standing over them, moving about in a mysterious way his witch-balls and muttering a strange guttural jargon, and this was repeated from day to day until the witch would fly unseen away in sore agony and distress and the cure was complete.⁶

Milo Erwin has left a record of Charley Lee, the Hamilton County witch master. Lee occasionally came down to Williamson County to preach in one of the first churches built there. More often, however, he was summoned to break the spells cast by a noted witch whose powers were too much for local talent to deal with. "She could do wonders, and inflict horrible spells on the young, such as fits, twitches, jerks, and such like; and many an old lady took the rickets at the mere sound of her name."⁷ On such occasions, Lee was summoned. Lee's method, which differed from that of Tipsword, is thus described by Erwin:

When she inflicted a dangerous spell, the parties had to send to Hamilton county for Charley Lee, the great witch-master to cure them. This he did by shooting her picture with a silver ball and some other foolery. It was a nice sight to see this old fool set up his board and then measure, point, and cypher around like an artillery man planting his battery, while the whole family were standing around veiled and with the solemnity and anxiety of a funeral.⁸

Tipsword and Lee were men of recognized standing in their profession, who followed orthodox methods. Sometimes a witch master resorted to more direct means than those described above. A case is recorded from St. Clair County of a man who established his claim to the title of witch master in a singular manner. It seems that two neighboring men were spending the night with the would-be witch master, all three sleeping in the same room. Late at night, the two neighbors were awakened by their host's loud laughter.

⁵ *History of Effingham County* (1883), p. 13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸ Milo Erwin, *The History of Williamson County* (1876), p. 42.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

"Mrs. ——— just came down the chimney," he explained, "and I have kicked her into the fire." The woman referred to, a noted local witch, appeared next day with her feet badly burned.⁹ Drawing the obvious conclusion, the local people willingly granted the ambitious man's claim to the title of witch master. It is recorded that the so-called witch shortly left the neighborhood for parts unknown.

Pioneer respect for the witch doctor is understandable when one recognizes the numerous kinds of mischief and even grievous harm attributed to witches. Some things that could not be explained otherwise could be explained as products of witchcraft; and the witch was a convenient scapegoat for those in need of an outlet for pent fears. In addition to the harm the witch could do to the pioneer or his family, she could bewitch his rifle or his livestock, milk his cow, and damage him in numerous other ways.

In a land where the rifle was very important in the economic scheme, any failure of that weapon was a serious matter that demanded explanation. The rifle was thought to be bewitched when the hunter without apparent cause failed to hit his target. William Oliver, an English traveler who spent eight months in Southern Illinois in 1842, wrote, "I was so unlucky as to afford what was considered an incontestable proof of the truth of witchcraft."¹⁰ Oliver's experience is such a good example of the kind of evidence upon which superstitions are built that it seems worthwhile to quote essential parts of his statement:

On looking past a tree, behind which I was lying, I saw two deer standing, evidently listening and ready to bound off. . . . I cautiously pushed forward my rifle, and having taken deliberate aim, fired at the one nearest me, which fell, as I thought, plump down on the spot. On raising myself up a little, I saw what I conceived to be the head of the deer above the long grass, and fearing it might escape, lay still and reloaded.— On looking past the tree again, I saw not only the head still in the same place, but the other deer also. One deer was quite enough in such hot weather, but this fellow was standing so beautifully that I was tempted, and fired at him. I heard the bullet play thump on his ribs, and off he bounded. No doubt I had not got the powder properly down the barrel when I lay and loaded behind a tree. Well, well, let him go, thought I, one is

⁹ *History of St. Clair County* (1881), p. 270.

¹⁰ William Oliver, *Eight Months in Illinois* (1843), p. 72.

quite enough. On looking towards the spot, I still saw the deer's head, though not quite so distinctly, as it seemed to have settled down among the grass. This was a good sign, so I loaded again, and marched up, when—there was no deer—no blood—not even the slightest trail in the grass! After looking around for a few moments, I went back to the tree from which I had fired, and could see nothing at all like a deer or a deer's head.¹¹

Oliver himself belittled such superstitious beliefs as witchcraft, but to the Randolph County pioneer this incident was "incontestable proof of the truth of witchcraft."

Milo Erwin, the Williamson County historian, reports that he had talked to one old man who had "drawn right down on a deer . . ., not over twenty steps distant, and never cut a hair."¹² His rifle was bewitched. Erwin records the following method of bewitching a gun:

When a man concluded that a neighbor was killing too many deer around his field, he would spell his gun, which he did by going out early in the morning, and, on hearing the crack of his rifle he walked backward to a hickory wythe, which he tied in a knot in the name of the devil. This rendered the gun worthless until the knot was untied.¹³

A spell of this sort could be broken by putting nine new pins in the rifle, filling the barrel with lye and corking it up, and setting the rifle away for nine days. "One old man," says Erwin, "told me he tried this and it broke the spell."¹⁴ Waller reports that a common method was "to take the gun to a stream running from a certain spring, unscrew the breech and allow the water to flow from the muzzle to the breech for a certain number of hours."¹⁵ Judging from these instances, we may conclude that both the spelling and breaking of the spell on rifles could be done by the layman without resort to the professional witch or wizard. From this distance in time, the "bewitched rifle" looks like a pretty good pioneer excuse for faulty loading or poor shooting.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹² Erwin, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁵ Elbert Waller, *Illinois Pioneer Days*, p. 52.

Another activity attributed to the witch was that of stealing milk from the neighbors' cows. She could do this in either of two ways. First, she might transform herself into a hare, sow, snake, or hedgehog, and suck the cow. Grace Partridge Smith reports an instance from Saline County in which a witch transformed herself into a large, black sow and sucked a neighbor's cow each morning until a way was found to thwart her.¹⁶ Second, witches were believed to have the power to transfer milk invisibly from the cow to a towel or some other object from which it was extracted by the witch. The devil, according to Kittredge, "milks the cow and then invisibly brings the milk to the object from which it appears to come."¹⁷ The towel was the object used by local witches for this purpose. Erwin says the witch extracted the milk from the fringe of the towel.¹⁸ Waller suggests that the witch "got the milk by wringing the towel."¹⁹ Neely reports an instance in which the witch got the milk by hanging a towel before her and milking the "neighbors' cows from the lower corners; when she had finished she would have several large foaming buckets of wholesome milk."²⁰ An early chronicler describes the process as follows:

This they did by fixing a new pin in a new towel for each cow intended to be milked. This towel was hung over her own door, and by means of certain incantations, the milk was extracted from the fringes of the towel, after the manner of milking a cow. This only happened when the cows were too poor to give much milk.²¹

Stories of hogs and snakes that suck cows in pasture may still be heard occasionally here. My informants insist that these are true stories at least as far as hogs are concerned—they aren't quite so positive about the snakes. It is at least easy to see how such tales may in the past have become associated with the various witchcraft myths.

Earlier in this discussion we have cited two or three instances of relatively recent date of witches that had transformed themselves into black cats. Several years ago a schoolboy in Saline County told

¹⁶ Grace Partridge Smith, "Folklore from Egypt," *Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 54, p. 50.

¹⁷ G. L. Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, p. 163.

¹⁸ Erwin, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

¹⁹ Waller, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

²⁰ Charles Neely, *Tales and Songs of Southern Illinois*, p. 104.

²¹ *History of Union County* (1883), p. 28.

me a peculiar incident of how members of his family believed a visitor transformed himself nightly into a snake and went on excursions into the country round about. Smith cites an instance from another county of an old woman who transformed herself, according to her neighbors, into a hare to plague them. This is probably an Irish contribution to our witch lore. "With her colleagues over the world changing themselves into tigers and wolves and other vast, fearsome creatures, the witch of Ireland winks—and turns into a hare."²²

Witches everywhere have always been great night riders, and sometimes they have transformed a man into a horse for their nightly gallop. "Now and then," says Kittredge, "a witch transforms a man into a horse by means of a magic bridle or otherwise, and rides him by night."²³ Smith records a story from Saline County of an old man "who insisted that the witches rode him, because when he woke up he was more tired than when he went to sleep. . . . The witches came down the chimney, took a bridle from behind the door, put it on him and rode him everywhere."²⁴ And, finally, there is the story of the man whom a neighbor by witchcraft turned into "a big bay horse every night and rode him hard but wouldn't give him any hay or corn."²⁵

None of the instances of belief in witchcraft cited in the foregoing pages is, of course, peculiar to Southern Illinois. Wherever in the world there has been no scientific explanation of phenomena harmful to man or his wife or his property, man has tended to rest the blame on the supernatural. That superstitions as old and as deep-seated as those of witchcraft should continue to linger among us is likewise understandable. It is highly probable that investigation of almost any geographical area would reveal a goodly quota of those superstitions commonly associated with witchcraft.

Southern Illinois Normal University

²² Theda Kenyon, *Witches Still Live*, p. 53.

²³ Kittredge, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

²⁴ Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

²⁵ Neely, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

CHARLES MATHEWS, COMEDIAN, AND THE AMERICAN NEGRO

by

HANS NATHAN

American Negro Minstrelsy began to emerge from English 18th Century tradition between 1812 and about 1825. With a small number of the Negro characters of this period (according to convention, acted by white men) we are familiar.¹ Further research might possibly discover a few additional ones. These characters appeared in humorous vocal entr'actes in the costume of black sailors and soldiers professing, under the influence of the war of 1812, to be either in the service of the English or the American army. They had few American traits, if any.

Among more genuine products of American life was the type of the rural Negro; but only one instance of his impersonation is known to us, and not even in detail. It is associated with the young Edwin Forrest who in 1823 played "Cuffee", a Kentucky Negro, in Sol Smith's (now lost) play "The Tailor in Distress; or a Yankee Trick." His partner was dark-skinned "Miss Philissy".²

The development of the American style of Negro impersonation, destined to become a national institution, was stimulated, if indirectly, by the English comedian Charles Mathews. Mathews may be said to have accelerated a realistic conception of the Negro, a quality without which American Negro Minstrelsy would never have flourished. Many performances of this witty and resourceful actor were in the style of his countryman's, Charles Dibdin's, "Table Entertainments".³ That is to say, Mathews did not act, but addressed his audiences, undisguised and seated behind a desk. His skits were in part lectures, in part dialogues, and included songs which were accompanied on a piano.

¹ They have been described in "Curiosities of the American Stage" by Laurence Hutton, New York, 1891, (Chapter "The American Stage Negro") and in "The Negro in Early American Songsters" by S. Foster Damon in "The Papers of The Bibliographical Society of America," Vol. XXVIII, part 2, 1934. Damon was the first to mention Charles Mathews in connection with American Negro Minstrelsy.

² Advertisement of this performance in "Edwin Forrest" by Laurence Barrett, Boston, 1881. See an additional, though undocumented, description of the performance in "Life of Edwin Forrest" by William R. Alger, London and Philadelphia, 1877, Vol. I, pp. 108 and 109.

³ "Negro Impersonation in Eighteenth Century England" by Hans Nathan, in Notes (Quarterly of the Music Library Association), September, 1945.

In 1822 he came to America and stayed for about a year and a half. Observing life in the young republic with curiosity (mixed, in British fashion, with scepticism) he was attracted by the Negroes. Feeling neither condescension nor pity toward them, he was delighted with their humor and their spontaneous response to music. Some of his experiences went into his theatrical acts, while others were merely recorded in private letters. How he may have reflected upon the power of music over the primitive mind when he saw "a very fat Negro . . . driving a stage coach . . . and urging his horses by different tunes on a fiddle, while he imperiously fastened the reins around his neck."⁴ Other opportunities for watching Negro mentality came his way. At a dinner party, he could not resist a little experiment on the attending Negro waiter, Maximilian. By means of ventriloquism, Mathews produced a high pitched, infantile voice whenever the waiter appeared. The inevitable happened. Glaring at Mathews' snuff-box which conspicuously lay on the table, Maximilian, after having dropped a dish before, finally poured a plate of soup "down a gentleman's back" and began "to laugh most immoderately". Pressed for an explanation of his shameful behavior, he answered, "Him only laughing to hear Mr. Mathews' child cry in de box."⁵

⁴ Letter of Charles Mathews written from Philadelphia in 1823, published in "Memoirs of Charles Mathews, Comedian, by Mrs. Mathews," London, 1839, Vol. III, p. 384.

⁵ "The London Mathews containing an account of this celebrated comedian's Trip to America: Being an annual lecture . . ." London, n.d. Other editions appeared in Philadelphia and Baltimore in 1824. Mathews used a similar ventriloquistic idea in 1818 when he was still in England. He appeared then as a French valet who was trying to locate a child that called him from somewhere. When he finally found it, an amusing conversation ensued. The scene was published in "Theatrical Olio", London, n.d. It included a colored engraving, by Cruikshank, of Mathews with his dummy seated on his knees. The two characters, the one patient to the point of desperation, the other precocious but feigning stupidity, anticipate our Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy by more than a hundred years. An excerpt of their conversation may be quoted here: *Child: Labbre! Labbre [valet]: Hush! vat is dat voice? Ch. Labbre! L. Eh! vere are you? Ch. Here. L. Vere? Ch. In de box. L. In de box? (opens the box) how come you in de box? Ch. I've been here all de time. L. But how come you in de box? Ch. I don't know. L. You don't know? Ch. No, I don't know. L. You don't know? you must know how you came in de box. Ch. I don't know. L. Oh, nonsense! nonsense! you know I hate you to say I don't know. Ch. I know that. L. Then why you say you don't know? Ch. I don't know. L. Pshah! nonsense! Ch. You'll be angry if I tell you? L. No, I won't. Ch. But you will though. L. No, indeed, I won't. Ch. 'Pon your honor you won't? L. 'Pon my honor I won't. Ch. I wanted to see you perform? L. You wanted to see me perform? Ch. Yes, so I took a box. L. Oh, you took a box to see me perform, did you? Well, what will you do for me now that I took you out of the box? Ch. I don't know. L. Nonsense! you say I don't know, you shall chantez sing me von song. . . . Ch. I can't sing. L. But you must sing, you can if you like. Ch. But I can't though, I don't like. L. Why don't you like? Ch. You'll be angry*

A few years later, Mathews incorporated his experiences into the character of a runaway slave, Agamemnon, who appeared in the skit "All Well at Natchitoches," a parody of Americans and their modes of life. Agamemnon was "a fat unwieldy fellow" who "conceals himself in the bottom of the well".⁶ A contemporary engraving of



Engraving of the runaway slave Agamemnon in "All Well at Natchitoches."

Agamemnon typifies the Negro as seen by an astute observer in the early twenties. Devoid of malice or sentimentality, he closely approached the stage Negro character, Jim Crow, that began to crystallize a little later.

Mathews collected "scraps of songs and malaprops" of the Negroes—"black fun", as he called it. While in New York, he did not fail to attend the Negroes' own theatre. And his reward was the following unusual rendition of Hamlet's monologue: "To be or not be, dat is him question, whether him nobler in de mind to suffer or lift up his arms against one sea of hubble-bubble and by oposum (oppose'em) end em." The word "oposum" reminded the audience of a favorite song entitled "Oposum up a gum tree", and they clamored for it vociferously. Hamlet complied. The performance over, Mathews tried to reconstruct what he had heard. One of his two transcriptions, neither one too accurate, may follow here:⁷

Oposum up a Gum Tree
Tinkey none can follow
Him damn quite mistaken
Raccoon in de hollow.
Oposum him creep softly
Raccoon him lay mum,

with me, if I tell you. *L.* No, I vill not upon my honor. *Ch.* There are so many people looking at me. *L.* Oh! I am very glad to see dat, it vill make good for me; vell, come, try some tune (sounds a high, low, and middle note, which the child imitates). *L.* You have not got von ear. *Ch.* Yes, I got two (the child sings part of God Save the King; and being too obstinate to finish it, Labbre puts him in the box.)

⁶ "The London Mathews. . ." *op. cit.*

⁷ "Sketches of Mr. Mathews' Celebrated Trip to America . . ." London, printed by and for J. Limbird, 143 Strand, n.d. Another version appeared in "The London Mathews . . ." *op. cit.*

Pull him by de long tail,
 Down opossum come.
 Jinkum, jankum, beau gash
 Twist 'em, twine 'em, run:
 Oh de poor opossum,
 Oh de sly racoon.

Opossum up a Gum Tree
 Racoon pull him down
 Tink him got him snugly,
 Oh de poor racoon.
 Racoon in de hollow
 Nigger down below
 Pull opossum's long tail,
 Racoon let him go.
 Jinkum, jankum, beau gash,
 Twist 'em, twine 'em, run:
 Oh de cunning Nigger,
 Oh de poor racoon.

Opossum up a Gum Tree
 Racoon in de hollow,
 No beat cunning Nigger
 Though him cannot follow.
 Nigger him so clever,
 Him so sly and rum;
 Pull him by de long tail
 Down opossum come.
 Jinkum, jankum, beau gash,
 Twist 'em, twine 'em, run:
 Oh de poor opossum,
 Oh de sly racoon.

The song may have originated among rural Negroes, for the raccoon and the opossum loom large in their thoughts. Its tune seems to be now forgotten.⁸ Fragments of its lyrics, however, have survived. They were first paraphrased in two minstrel songs of the late twenties and the early thirties, in "Zip Coon" ("posum up a gum tree coony on a stump")⁹ and, more literally, in a rare version of "Jim Crow":¹⁰

Dere's possum up de gum tree,
 An racoon in de hollow;

⁸ "Oxford Song Book," Vol. II, London, 1927, collected and arranged by Thomas Wood. Footnote to "Possum Up a Gum Tree" reads "Words from a 'genuine negro song' popular in this country c. 1820. No tune could be traced. . . ."

⁹ In "Series of Old American Songs" edited by S. Foster Damon, Providence, 1936.

¹⁰ "Jim Crow . . . as sung by Mr. G. W. Dixon . . ." Published by John Cole, Baltimore, n.d. [early thirties].

Wake snakes for june-bugs
Stole my half a dollar.

A combination of the latter version and a line from the original resulted in this stanza, still known to Southern Negroes in our own time:¹¹

Possum up de gum stump
Dat raccoon in de holler;
Twis'im out an' git'im down
An' I'll gin [give] you half a doller

Another Negro variant is:¹²

Possum up de gum stump, coony up de hollow;
Little gal at our house fat as she kin wallow.

which the white backwoodsmen have elaborated into:¹³

Possum up a gum stump, coonie in the holler,
Little gal at our house, fat as she can waller.
Saddle up the old nag, martingale and collar,
Fetch her down to my house, I'll give you half a dollar.

Mathews was charmed by the Negroes' dialect. He studied it until he commanded it himself. A fond idea of his was to impersonate a black Methodist preacher whom he had heard and seen in one of the "Black Brimstone Churches". But he never had the courage to do it publicly, merely recording the sermon on paper. If it had been performed on a stage, it would be one of the earliest, perhaps even the earliest Negro stump speech of the American theatre:¹⁴

My wordy bredren, it a no use to come to de meetum-house to ear de most helly-gunt orashions if a no put a de cent into de plate; de spiritable man cannot get a on widout de temporarilities; twelve 'postles must hab de candle to burn. You dress a self up in de fine blue a cot, and a bandalore breechum and tink a look like a gemman, but no more like a gemman dan put a finger in a de fire, and take him out again, widout you put

¹¹ "Negro Folk Rhymes" by Thomas W. Talley, New York, 1922.

¹² From "On the Trail of Negro Folk-Songs" by Dorothy Scarborough, Cambridge, Mass., 1925. Its melody (as given in "American Ballads and Folksongs" by John A. Lomax and Alan Lomax, New York, 1934) is less a tune than the words declaimed in pitch.

¹³ "Traditional Music of America" by Ira W. Ford, New York, 1940. The tune, as published here, shows features of banjo and fiddle music of the forties. Hence it cannot be the original one.

¹⁴ From "Memoirs of Charles Mathews . . ." *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 390 to 392.

a de money in a de plate. He lend a to de poor, lend to de Law (Lord), if you like de secoority drop a de cents in to de box. My sister in a de gallery too dress em up wid de poke a de bonnet and de furbelow-tippet, and look in de glass and say, "Pretty Miss Phyllis, how bell I look!" But no pretty in de eye of de Law (Lord) widout a drop a cent in de plate. My friend and bredren, in my endeavor to save you, I come across de bay in de stim a boat. I never was more shock dan when I see de race a horse a rubbin down. No fear o' de Law afore dere eye on de Sabbat a day, ben I was tinkin of de great enjawment my friend at a Baltimore was to have dis night, dey rub a down de horse for de use of de debbil. Twix you and I, no see what de white folk make so much fun of us, for when day act so foolish demselve, dey tink dey know ebery ting, and dat we poor brack people know notin at all amose (almost). Den shew dem how much more dollars you can put in de plate dan de white meetum-houses. But, am sorry to say, some of you put three cent in a plate, and take out a quarter a dollar. What de say ven you go to hebben? Dey ask you what you do wid de twenty-two cent you take out of de plate when you put in de tree cent? What you go do den?

Mathews also picked up some Negro lyrics and sent them to England, implying that they were genuine products. Their self-conscious and stilted opening lines alone

O! love is like de pepper-corn
It make me act so cute
It make de bosoms feel so warm
And eye shine like new boot!

reveal a white origin.¹⁵ The truth was that Mathews had taken the song from a broadside which had fallen into his hands.¹⁶ It was distributed in the streets of Boston on July 15, 1822, when the Negro population paraded through that city to celebrate the anniversary of the abolition of the slave trade.¹⁷ Written by the foes of equal rights, the broadside was a vicious parody of the occasion. In fake Negro dialect it burlesqued "De Sheef Marshal" 's order of the day, the toasts made by the assembly at their banquet, and a song which, in part, was quoted by Mathews. Its tune was that of "Soldier's Gratitude", probably an English air.

¹⁵ "Memoirs . . ." *op. cit.*, vol. 3, p. 391.

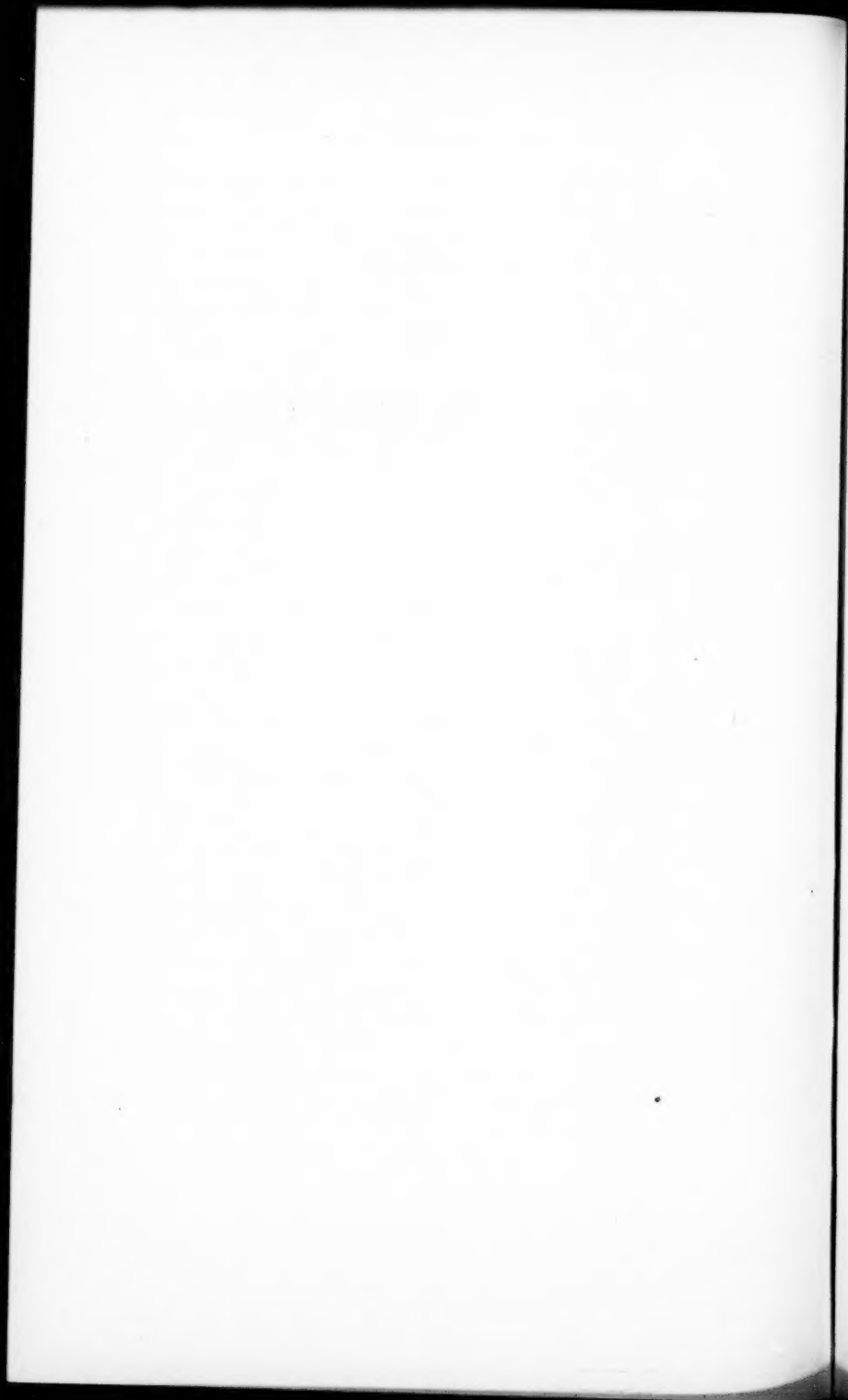
¹⁶ S. F. Damon (see his article, *op. cit.*) found this broadside (in the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.), but erred in its interpretation.

¹⁷ See advance notice in the *Columbian Centinel*, Boston, of July 13, 1822.

Back in England in 1824, Mathews, in a public lecture entitled "Trip to America" (including "All Well in Natchitoches"), gave his countrymen a vivid report of his adventures abroad. As a result, apparently, public interest in Negro satire increased.¹⁸ But this was pale compared to the enthusiasm which, at about the same time, greeted T. D. Rice as Jim Crow, on the stages of the New World.

Michigan State College

¹⁸ See, for example, among the volumes of "Humorous Illustrations" published in London between 1826 and 1828, a Negro cartoon entitled "Life in Philadelphia", with a caption in Negro dialect (in the possession of the Widener Memorial Room in Harvard College Library).



HOW TO CATCH A WITCH

by

Wm. Marion Miller

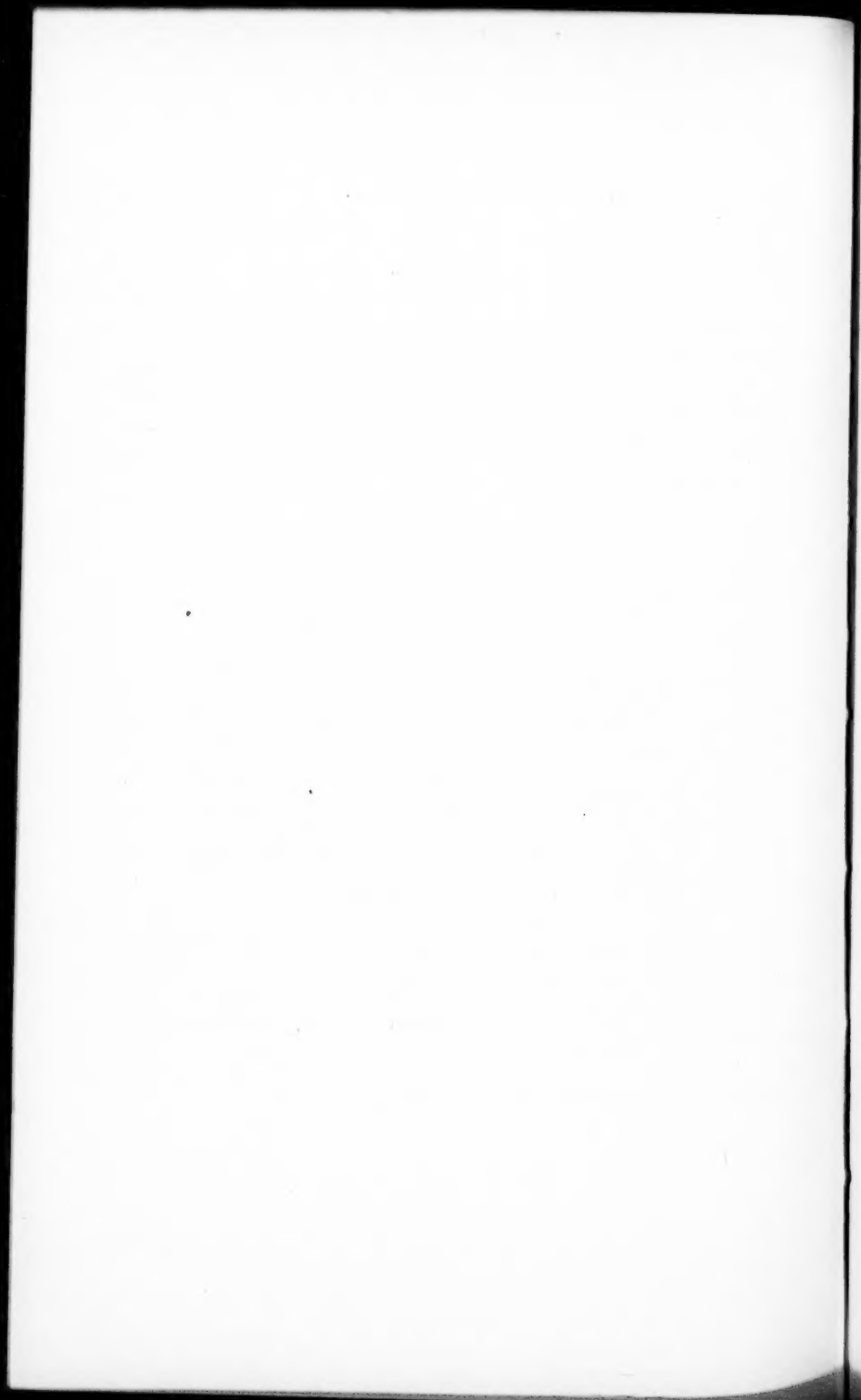
Two summers ago I was making a study of a French community in Northeastern Darke County, Ohio, which lies in the southwestern part of the state. While thus engaged I picked up several stories about witches and witchcraft, in which there once had been a rather strong belief among certain elements of the population of French descent. The following one was told me by the son of a French settler who came to the region in 1839:

Suppose a witch has caused the death of a valuable piece of live stock, a well-known activity of witches. It seems that they never bothered with scrawny, rangy animals, but concentrated their efforts on the best ones the farmer had. One may suspect the doer of evil, but to catch her (the local witches are always feminine, or at least I never heard of a male one) is the problem. But to one in the know the matter was relatively simple, and here is how it was done.

Cut out the heart of the animal whose death has been brought about by the witch and boil the heart until well done. Then cut a sprout on one-year growth hazel—this is highly important—point it, and plunge the pointed end into the cooked heart. If all goes well, the other end of the stick will point in the direction of the witch, and she will be drawn irresistibly to the scene, where full and just retribution may be exacted. Just what made the score even I did not learn.

My informant could not state whether or not this method of catching a witch had ever been put to the test and yielded valid results, but he had been told that it would. In any case, the story illustrates an instance of belief in witchcraft as practiced in one part of the United States.

Miami University, Oxford, Ohio



BOOK REVIEWS

Sam Slick in Texas, by W. Stanley Hoole. San Antonio, Texas, 1945. xix, 78. \$2.

Samuel Adams Hammett (1816-1865) was a New Yorker who spent a decade or so in Texas and wrote about it in many periodicals and in two books: *A Stray Yankee in Texas*. By Philip Paxton, New York, 1853; and *Piney Woods Tavern; or, Sam Slick in Texas*, Philadelphia, 1858. He wrote a third, and inferior, book about some amphibious Long Islanders: *The Wonderful Adventures of Captain Priest*, New York, 1855.

In *Sam Slick in Texas* Mr. Hoole records the pleasures he has found in reading Hammett's books, and the facts concerning Hammett's obscure life that he has been able to gather during a five-year search. This search was so diligent that J. Frank Dobie, after listing in a "Foreword" the names of several authors with biographies as shadowy as Hammett's, expresses his hope that Mr. Hoole will now "go after some of these other escapes." By lengthy examination of materials in Texas, New York, Connecticut, and elsewhere, Mr. Hoole has been able to discover many of Hammett's fugitive sketches and to add to the extremely limited biographical studies of Hammett the information that he was a member of the first class enrolled at New York University, that he was founder and president of the University's first literary society, that he sailed in 1835 on a particular vessel to Charleston on his way to Texas, that he was during 1846 a businessman in Galveston and Houston, and that after ten or eleven years in Texas he returned to New York where he joined a business partnership, bought property, and contributed sketches to periodicals.

In addition to collecting these items of positive biographical information, Mr. Hoole has culled from Hammett's three volumes information which he considers autobiographical. Walter Blair a few years ago, in reviewing a book which used imaginative periodical sketches as part of the basis for a description of the real frontier, made very clear the dangers of overestimating the realism of such materials. But to consider Hammett's reporting accurate is perhaps less dangerous than it might be, for Hammett said himself that his books, although they should be classed as fiction, were basically true and reported his Texas life as he had lived it. It is well to remember, though, that *Longstreet in Georgia Scenes*, the chief early work of the category in which Hammett's Texas books belong, also claimed in his preface that he was accurately reporting life in his section, when actually some of the elements in the sketches were literary clichés by no means necessarily Georgian, and one of the sketches is now reported to be identified as a borrowed eighteenth century piece.

In addition to his biographical contribution Mr. Hoole does a service to students of American civilization by putting before them

his great enthusiasm for Hammett's books. Taking a leaf from Napier Wilt's early study of American humorists, he points out that Hammett and others of his sort were our first group of writers to approach realism. And he makes clear that Hammett had experienced a great deal at first hand and was a far better and more interesting reporter than most of the contemporary tourists, soldiers, and sportsmen who rushed into print with books designed to satisfy the wide demand for information about Texas. Mr. Hoole reminds us also of Hammett's interest in American speech which makes his books useful to language students, and of his considerable interest in folklore. The folklorist will find *Piney Woods Tavern* with its lengthy series of tales the most rewarding of the three books, although *Stray Yankee* touches on such subjects as a negress widely thought to have supernatural powers, Southern and Western lawyers as disseminators—and manufacturers—of folklore, a Texan with fabulous tracking ability, and two or three remarkable Mississippi steamboat men; while *Captain Priest* includes in a series of "Legends of City and Country" an account of a wondrously "acute" Down-Easterner.

But among the writers belonging to what has been called the "Big Bear School," Hammett is not in the first rank. His chief failing is his style. Although punning was a common ailment of such authors, it would be hard to find an American writer who punned more, and more miserably, than he. The most noteworthy examples of his unpleasant word play appear in the "Midsummer Chapers" of *Captain Priest*, but his two Texas books are not free from this fault. His other stylistic failing was a high-falutin diction which rarely served a purpose. George W. Harris, for example, in his Sut Lovingood yarns put elevated writing to good use as contrast to backwoods talk. Hammett used this device occasionally but with less success, and wrote many a fancy passage when the nearest crude dialect was several pages away. He had been, after all, first president of the Philomathean Society at N. Y. U.

It apparently being the duty of reviewers to draw attention to errors, it should be pointed out that Mr. Hoole errs regarding the dates of Hammett's first publications. He says, p. 42, that the earliest of Hammett's sketches were published on March 10 and 24, 1849, "only a few weeks after Hammett had returned to New York City." Actually, five such pieces by Hammett were published during the previous year in the weekly New York *Spirit of the Times*. The earliest of them appeared on October 28, 1848, in Vol. XVIII, p. 421; and the others followed in the same volume on pp. 439, 457, 469, 519. (Mr. Hoole perhaps also overlooked a poem certainly written by Hammett which appeared in the *Spirit* on March 3, 1849, signed "Major Bunkum," a pen-name of Hammett's that probably should be added to those recorded in *Sam Slick in Texas*.) The appearance of the five sketches in 1848 leads to further correction—of statements by both Mr. Hoole and Hammett—because two or

three of the five appeared later in *Piney Woods Tavern* although Mr. Hoole says, p. 64, that *Piney Woods Tavern*, unlike *Stray Yankee* and *Captain Priest*, "was not published piecemeal or serially before reaching book form," and quotes Hammett's own statement that the book appeared as one "who leaps into the ring."

It is ungracious to point out Mr. Hoole's understandable oversight of sketches that appeared in a rather rare periodical, and to complain about Hammett's style, nor does it give a correct impression; for both writers have done good work. Hammett's two widely-sold books brought Texas of the eighteen-thirties and -forties alive to his contemporaries, and they do the same for readers today. Mr. Hoole's volume, filled as it is with his well-founded enthusiasm, is certain to increase the number of Hammett's followers; and his energetic research on Hammett's life makes one join in Professor Dobie's eagerness for him to turn loose his detective talent on other worthy American writers whose biographies are obscure.

Carvel Collins

Swarthmore College

Jersey Genesis, by Henry Charlton Beck. New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1945. xiv, 304. \$3.50.

Not far removed from the Ain't-Nature-Grand school of non-fiction—and perhaps established by the same ancient founder—is the these-are-the-people-unspoiled-by-the-world-outside school. And to that school, I fear, belong Mr. Beck and his latest book. And lest it be thought that I am facetious, Mr. Beck himself applies the terms "unspoiled by the world outside, entirely uncontaminated" to the finely-drawn old—and they are almost all old in years—men and women who people the banks of southern New Jersey's Mullica River, the setting of his book. For all his attitude of the man of the world looking at the "natives," Mr. Beck upholds the unpalatable thesis that these people have chosen the blessings of their pastoral life in the little river towns in preference to the humdrum monotony of the complicated metropolitan life.

Mr. Beck says he originally intended a novel. In some ways, the published product reads like the notes for a novel. But the author says he surrendered the idea of a novel because of his fear that nothing except the setting would be believed. According to him, "The truth is . . . almost too good. . . . All these people are real. These villages are as I know them and as these people know them."

I still don't believe it, in short; and, despite the fact that the author gives over parts of his preface and of one chapter to justifying his stand, I feel that his very protestation shows that he has willfully ignored the significance of the advanced age of most of his informants as well as the nostalgia that must be theirs in regarding a life that is passing and, in many instances, has already passed. It cannot, despite Mr. Beck, be an unmitigated happiness that comes

from recalling the irretrievable glory of dead industries and abandoned railroads and vanished inns or from the realization that one is the last to follow his occupation.

The foregoing may seem harsh. It is meant to be so, for in so far as *Jersey Genesis* is based on a sentimental delusion, it is a bad book. But there are many other things—most of them good—to be said of *Jersey Genesis*. It is written in a pleasing, personalized and chatty style, such as is seldom found within book covers bearing the imprint of a university press. True, the chattiness sometimes verges on the coy, but not often. There is an occasional bit of beautiful imagery or deft phrasing that is very telling as: "... the present *was* outside the door. It is a door that closes easily among the river people." There is a great deal of whimsical humor that spices the book, such as Mr. Beck's supposition that the Jersey Devil, whose appearance was understood to be an omen of disaster, died of overwork!

And above all there is a fascinating collection of people—for Mr. Beck is primarily a collector of people. They are old people, mostly; farmers, ship builders, storekeepers, rivermen, Grannies, Aunties, a bridgekeeper, a decoy-maker, a bargeman, and so on through a great galaxy. And they are masterfully portrayed whether it be by a many-page analysis of a shipbuilder or a few paragraphs about the man who confiscated a church's Bible as a penalty for its non-payment of a bill. It would be a pleasure to dwell on this aspect of the book, its greatest literary and human value and its greatest part both in quality and quantity.

But how much folklore is there in the book? Despite the jacket blurb, very little. Certainly less than a fifth of the pages contain anything that can be justly labeled folklore. There is more to be called history—the rise and decline of the area and its economy. There is much that can be termed ethnography, albeit a very unsystematic ethnography: Such is the discussion of moss-gathering, the collection and use of salt hay, the intriguing recipes, and so on.

The folklore content—as we usually define folklore in this country—falls into a number of categories. There are twenty or more tales, ghost stories, local legends, and whoppers that could be safely termed folk. The author retells many anecdotes, some of which at least would meet the specifications. There are: one ballad, a little folk medicine, quite a bit of folk humor including even a pun, and a couple of folk customs. Two folk games are mentioned, including "Anthony Over" which I have seen played this very year in my Indiana back yard. Excellent testimony is given as to the accuracy and retention of the folk memory even for details reaching back to the Revolution. And above all there are valuable examples of folk speech. If you don't know the meaning of dog-hair, garvey, blickey, bladderin', shinplasters, married (as applied to building timbers), boyzie, mossbankers, sheet-topped wagon, fyke, and mossies, you must read Mr. Beck. And he doesn't stop with diction,

for there are also folk derivations of family names and some keen reproductions of speech patterns and folk sayings. Witness "Him's hard but him's good" of Jersey Lightning, a potent potable; and "The more you take care of corn and politics, the better they grow up."

There is an intangible and very enjoyable quality that a folklorist will find in the book. If he has worked in the field, he will recognize clearly the kind of people dealt with and enviously a very deft manner of dealing with them. Mr. Beck patently loves people. And if the folklorist has not worked in the field, he will find exposed to him the joy there is in collecting and the pleasure there is in meeting those people who are frequently too coldly denominated "informants."

Finally, the folklorist should read *Jersey Genesis*, for it offers some values to him. It is well-written, and it will be enjoyed. As a counterbalance, it is rambling, unsystematic, certainly not scholarly. And, for this reviewer, it is too often *folksy* rather than *folk*. Yet, with reservations it is to be recommended.

Wm. Hugh Jansen

Indiana University

Singin' Yankees, by Philip D. Jordan. Minneapolis, 1946. xi, 305. \$3.50.

The indigenous musical trends in 19th century America are often overlooked. True, they did not thrive in the concert halls of philharmonic societies or in the class rooms of old universities, but they existed. It was not in elegantly wrought works such as the Indian Suite and New England Idyls of Edward MacDowell that they were summed up but rather in some of the unpretentious airs sung by the millions. The rough-hewn gaiety and good humored swagger of Old Dan Tucker and Dixie, the humane fervor of John Brown's Body, the jauntiness of Sousa's Stars and Stripes for Ever, are they not the humble yet true products of the American temperament?

To these native trends in American music belong the activities of the singing troupes or singing families who appeared in the forties. To one of them Professor Jordan has devoted his recent book entitled *Singin' Yankees*. These troupes usually consisted of four or five singers, including one or two women. Roaming all over the country they were heard in village barns, churches, exhibition and concert halls. Walt Whitman, alert and sensitive observer of America, welcomed them in rhapsodic sentences. Tired of the artificial coloraturas of Italian opera, he praised the native simplicity of their songs and their manner of performance. Their voices were untrained, but they showed a natural sweetness and clarity; their pronunciation was unaffected and undoubtedly full of local inflections. Their part-singing was artless but perfectly blended. Their texts, some of which were homemade, were realistic, comic or sentimental,

the realistic ones highlighting or lampooning events of the day. In contrast to the Alpine singing troupes of the twenties and thirties from which the American families derived, they did not confine themselves to folkmusic but borrowed any tune to which new words could easily be fitted—minstrel songs, hymns and sentimental “ballads.” The value of these American troupes lay more in the style of their performance than in the musical and literary material which they used. From the sheet music which most of the singers published one cannot justly gauge their importance.

The Hutchinsons from Milford, New Hampshire, were the best and longest known of these singing families. In Professor Jordan they have now found their faithful biographer. An experienced and conscientious historian, he has spared no pains to collect his documents from numerous and widely scattered sources—from the song books, diaries, books and pamphlets of the Hutchinsons (they took themselves very seriously), from obscure newspapers, magazines and playbills, in libraries and historical societies. This huge mass of material plus the author's intimate knowledge of the highways and byways of 19th century America contribute to a lively and readable book. It is not, however, a historical account of the entire movement of the singing families, with the Hutchinsons at its center; such an account will have to be written some time, possibly by Mr. Jordan himself. Instead, it is a fictionalized story of the character, bents and activities of the New Hampshire singers. It covers their lives from the early forties to the end of the century. Mr. Jordan gives not only a detailed description of their musical tours but of the big and little events that accompanied them. This enables him to include sketches of the contemporary scene, for the Hutchinsons were more than musicians. From the beginning of their career they had made it their task of working for a cause, such as abolitionism, temperance, or woman's rights. They preached and argued in song, and their travels were often adventures. They had many enemies, but among their friends were well known writers, poets and politicians such as Dickens, Whittier and William Lloyd Garrison. While on the one hand they were interested in such fads as mesmerism, they were also practical enough to found a town in the Minnesota wilderness. They had the idealism to fight for unpopular beliefs, but they also had the business instinct that enabled them to cash in on their talents. Mr. Jordan points out clearly this dualism in their personalities, a dualism typical of many Americans of their period.

The author devotes the first half of his book to a detailed, and often day by day account of the first ten years of the career of the Hutchinsons. This makes for slow reading, since the Hutchinsons, if magnified, seem rather dull individuals. There are a number of well chosen illustrations and many quotations from song texts, though not a single tune. Very few of these quotations are as neat and homespun as the following:

While Europe's in commotion, and her monarchs in a fret

We're teaching them a lesson which they never can forget;
And this they fast are learning, Uncle Sam is not a fool,
For the people do their voting, and the children go to school.

Yet all of them lend authenticity to the narrative. The book often features the Hutchinsons in dialogue, but most of it is of the author's invention.

Hans Nathan

Michigan State College

Johnny Chinook, by Robert E. Gard. Toronto and New York, 1945. xix, 360. \$3.50.

Johnny Chinook is a combination guidebook, local history, tale collection, personal recollection, and conducted excursion into a national nostalgia. The setting is the Province of Alberta, Canada.

The book is the outgrowth of Mr. Gard's work as Director of the Alberta Folklore and Local History Project under the sponsorship of The Rockefeller Foundation. Mr. Gard also has served as editor of the *Alberta Folklore Quarterly*, and he is now at the University of Wisconsin.

With the aid of an introduction by Donald Cameron, the reader gets an excellent orientation in the geography and background of the area; and he comes away from the whole book with a new understanding and appreciation of this area, so near to but so little known by most residents of the United States.

The content of the book is considerably varied. It is an informal, sometimes rambling, succession of yarn-spinning and background detail of the four main settled areas: the short grass country of Southern Alberta; the park belt, dominated by Edmonton; the foothills; and the area of Peace River. (If you attempt to use the map on the inside covers, be sure that you are facing east and that you realize that the pictures and names are printed parallel to the longitude lines rather than parallel to the latitude lines.)

The procession of characters includes a motley crew—the amusing, strange, wonderful, and pathetic crew that one should expect to find in a frontier situation. There are bad men, tricksters, local heroes, the unwashed, ranchers, cowboys, Indians, Mounties, trappers, struggling settlers, a rainmaker, students, missionaries, railroaders, bootleggers, miners, and, of course, promoters of numerous blue sky projects. All these and many others are chronicled with considerable vitality and are treated with genuine affection.

The folklorist will doubtless be most interested in the eighty or ninety authentic folktales of the book. (I wish Mr. Gard would not call every oral narrative a folktale.) These vary from two and four line jokes and retorts to rather lengthy Indian myths. The selection of tall tales about the weather is especially fine; but all are well told.

Part II, Chapter IV, "Tales of Foothill and Mountain," contains more folktales than any comparable section; but there are some folktales in most of the chapters.

Mr. Gard says in his prologue: "You get a feeling about a certain place. You can't exactly explain the way you feel. . . ." But Mr. Gard manages to communicate considerable of his feeling, as well as his knowledge and his lore.

Ernest W. Baughman

Indiana University

NOTICE

The Southeastern Folklore Society will hold its first postwar meeting on the evening of November 28, 1946, in the Tutwiler Hotel, Birmingham, Alabama, in conjunction with the annual meeting of the South Atlantic Modern Language Association. The program as announced by Dr. Thomas B. Stroup, Secretary-Treasurer of the Society, is as follows:

PROGRAM

1. "The 'Drone'—A Survival of Religious Drama?" by Professor Dorothy Horne, Maryville College.
2. "Three Folk Motifs in Milton's English Poems" by Professor Edwin C. Kirkland, University of Florida.
3. "Present State of French Folklore Studies in North America" by Professor Joseph M. Carrière, President, American Folklore Society, University of Virginia.
4. "The Folklorist as Apostle of a 'New Humanism'" by Professor George Pullen Jackson, Vanderbilt University.
5. "Report of the Folklore Institute of America" by Professor Edwin C. Kirkland, University of Florida. Discussion led by Professor George Pullen Jackson, Vanderbilt University.
6. Business meeting:
Report of the Secretary-Treasurer.
Election of Officers.
Resolutions.

All those who are in any way interested in folklore are cordially invited to attend this meeting and also the sessions of the South Atlantic Modern Language Association.



